

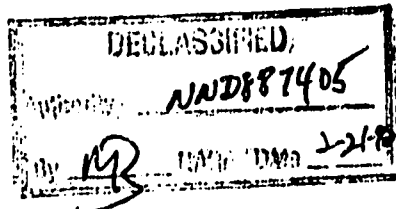
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*Recd  
Jan. 5, 1957*

TO : C - Mr. Frederic Rainhardt  
FROM : INR - Hugh S. Cumming, Jr. *HSC*  
SUBJECT: Soviet Leadership Situation

In accordance with a suggestion of EE the attached memorandum has been prepared in connection with the impending consultations with Ambassador Thompson.



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### SOVIET LEADERSHIP SITUATION

A number of developments leading up to and surrounding the recent Central Committee plenum suggest that, while Khrushchev to all appearances is firmly in control of the Soviet regime, he has been concerned over dissatisfaction with certain of his policies and possibly with some aspects of his method of rule. The plenum occurred against a background of over a year of fairly consolidated rule by Khrushchev since the October 1957 ouster of Zhukov and in the face of the impending "extraordinary" Party Congress, ostensibly called to approve the new Seven Year Plan. The current period, therefore, takes on significance, from Khrushchev's standpoint, as the time to patch any cracks in his own position and ensure a smooth-running show at the Congress, and from the standpoint of any remaining opposition elements dissatisfied with any of Khrushchev's policies, as possibly the last opportunity to make a move which might succeed in establishing restraints on Khrushchev or in modifying certain policies.

In both the nature of the recent plenum and in Khrushchev's report are elements which, though in keeping with his past practices in launching new programs, have a defensive aspect. No other post-war plenum has been blown up into a self-admiration extravaganza similar to Supreme Soviet sessions or has included large numbers of visitors and speakers who are not members of the Central Committee. The post-Stalin period has witnessed several occasions when significant policy differences apparently were taken beyond the Party Presidium to the wider forum of the Central Committee; sessions of the Central Committee have been regularly convened, in fact, this session represented the seventh in a period of one year when only a minimum of two is required. The December plenum seemed to seek the wider forum of public opinion and was not entirely respectful of the prestige of the Central Committee which is not normally turned into a sort of sideshow. Publicity was released on the plenum the first day and continued throughout the session in a manner unprecedented for such sessions.

The most significant factors suggesting that Khrushchev was somewhat on the defensive are the tone of his speech, his renewal of the attack on the anti-Party group, more intensive than at any time since their June 1957 ouster, and finally the Bulganin confession, the first public confession of conspiracy by a high-ranking Soviet figure since the trials of the '30s. There was no apparent agricultural reason for calling a plenum to discuss agriculture at this time. Moreover, the contrast between the handling of this plenum and the November 12 plenum which approved the

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Seven-Year Plan Theses is notable. The latter, although treating the subject of the whole economy and projecting its development for seven years as well as approving the educational reform and other measures, required only one day. Less than three days later Khrushchev, according to the initial TASS broadcast version of his speech to military graduates, stated that another plenum on agriculture would be necessary in mid-December, but this comment was edited out of versions of his speech published subsequently. In the week and a half preceding the December plenum, all the full members of the Presidium, including out-of-town members, were in Moscow and all appeared in a group on two occasions. The train of events while far from conclusive suggests that Khrushchev possibly was dissatisfied with the handling of the November plenum; if something was at issue, however, it presumably was settled in his favor in the first part of December and the second plenum came off as he desired. It does not appear that critical issues were settled in the Central Committee plenum in this case; otherwise it is likely that Mikoyan would not have departed for Poland the second day of the meeting even on a scheduled visit.

The tone of Khrushchev's report is notable in several respects. He begins with a somewhat unusual remark concerning the vital need to render an "account to the people of the position of agriculture." The speech was devoid of his usual type of earthy humor and proverbs. Just why a report was necessary covering the progress of agriculture in the past five years, especially following one of the most successful Soviet harvests, is not clear. While Khrushchev's report included a few "advanced" Communist overtones -- remarks on the fate of private plots and the introduction of communal facilities on collective and state farms -- the main impact of his speech lay in the defense of past and present programs. Khrushchev released the 1958 figure on total grain production as has not been done since 1952. His attack on the anti-Party group went into greater detail than previously on their shortcomings with respect to agriculture both during and prior to the five year period being covered. Later in his concluding remarks to the plenum Khrushchev states that it is "his impression that everyone has not yet fully realized how great and, at the same time, how complex is the work which collective and state farms have to carry out in the coming seven-year period." He indicates that some changes in personnel will be necessary, but, while not clear on whether this refers to top and/or lower echelons, he warns that he does not have in mind mass removals of officials. Finally, Khrushchev asserted that "the question of overcoming the backwardness of agriculture and the need to have a sharp upsurge in it was a matter not only of internal but also of international importance." The culmination of these factors suggests that Khrushchev was dramatizing his most successful policy achievement and one which ranks high on the regime's priorities in order to fend off questioning and disagreement regarding his agricultural or other policies, past, present, and projected.

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There are several possible policies, both internal and external, visible in the recent past which might have generated dissatisfaction. Internal possibilities are agriculture itself, the recent educational reform, or the industrial reorganization, although there has been little recent evidence to indicate significant problems with any of these policies. In the foreign field the handling of Yugoslavia and the Eastern European satellites as well as the risks involved in the Middle East, Taiwan Straits and Berlin are notable examples. During the past year the repeated pressure for a summit conference, feelers on trade with the United States or for an agreement of some sort with the West have seemed to indicate an urgency on Khrushchev's part for something to dramatize as a foreign policy success.

Khrushchev's method of rule, similarly, may be a matter of concern to some. He has for the most part tended to be pragmatic and some of the regime's ideologists may feel he has underestimated the need for ideological underpinning. There were reports at the time of the 20th Party Congress in 1956 and later that some of the leaders felt he mis-handled the question of destalinization. Suslov's name repeatedly is cited, not as desiring further aggrandizement of his own position, but as the figure behind criticism of Khrushchev's methods. Some Soviet leaders may feel that the apparent hardening during the past year of Soviet foreign and bloc policies (anti-revisionist campaign in Eastern Europe, the attack on the Tito regime, increased priority to the support of local Communist parties in the mid-East and India, and so forth) has not been followed by sufficient tightening up of certain aspects of internal policy. Khrushchev's efforts at the plenum, therefore, may reflect a defense of his desire to continue in the main the current internal line, after having yielded both to events and perhaps to pressures in other fields of policy.

There are other factors which also seem in some way connected with the chain of events in December. The removal of Serov as head of the KGB and the subsequent failure to announce his successor for nearly three weeks is unusual. Moreover, the coincidence of this development with comments made by Khrushchev to Senator Humphrey and British Laborite Noel-Baker concerning his intention to curtail the power of the secret police seems more than accidental. There had been overt evidence of increasing power being delegated to the KGB, i.e. the assumption of control over the border guards. Other reports of the greater incidence of KGB uniforms on Moscow streets and its stepped-up harassment of foreign diplomatic and military travelers in recent years suggested a more important role. The method of subordination of the secret police to the Party at the center which existed after Beriya's removal was never clear but was assumed to consist of subordination to collective control of the Party

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Presidium. With the elimination of all but Mikoyan and Voroshilov of Khrushchev's older colleagues on the Presidium, the question of what remains of Party control of the KGB may have become critical.

A related factor was underlined by the appearance in Pravda on December 4 of an article by Moscow Party Secretary Ustinov which was the first extensive discussion of the "collective leadership" theme for well over a year. Although ostensibly written regarding lower Party echelons, the piece included language concerning the dangers of unilateral decisions on policy matters which may have been aimed at Khrushchev. While Khrushchev does not appear to have a conscious desire to rule as arbitrarily as Stalin, he seems to find it difficult to avoid voicing ideas on impending policies fairly soon after they pop into his mind or while they are still undergoing preliminary discussion in the Presidium.

The past year may represent a turning point in the nature of the power structure of the Soviet regime. It was a year in which Khrushchev's emergence as victor over his major rivals became clear and the Party apparatus, as an institution, seemed to have gained effective control of all other institutions. The point may have been reached where Khrushchev finds the institution primarily responsible for his position, the Party, a restraint on his freedom of action on certain occasions. The Party apparatus, for its part, will be determined to ensure that a situation similar to the Stalin period will not arise in which the Party does not have complete control of other institutions because of independent strings of control pulled by the dictator. The appointment of Shelepin, a key Party official, to replace Serov as KGB head may fall within this context. There is much evidence suggesting that Shelepin has been a Khrushchev favorite, but on the other hand this was also true of Serov. The significant fact is that one is a Party professional and the other a police professional, whether Shelepin's appointment was more Khrushchev's handiwork or the Party's cannot be ascertained, but Shelepin in either case is probably more acceptable to the Party apparatus than Serov.

A factor which also may have figured in the secret police question is the question of vigilance, which received considerable attention in October and November. The campaign was highlighted by an article in Party Life by V. P. Moskovsky, a leading Party propaganda and agitation official, which ran through the gamut of examples of lax vigilance reminiscent of the early 1953 period and featuring the by-word of that period "rotozeistvo," which to Party officials as well as most white collar workers probably seemed an omen of some sort of crackdown. While the connection to the Shelepin appointment is tenuous, there undoubtedly would be some concern on the part of Party officials over letting any sort of crackdown be administered by a professional policeman.

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Finally, among the factors which seem to bear on the current leadership situation is the coincidence in timing of recent events in China, namely, the commune program, the extravagant claims regarding progress toward Communism, the subsequent soft-peddling of the ideological claims, the "flattening out" for the time being of the commune program and Mao's resignation as Chief of state. The Soviet emphasis on the correctness of the collective farm program, on the need for various sorts of incentives, and an all-around industrialization as a prerequisite to the transition to Communism, which were contained in the Seven-Year Plan Theses and an article by a leading Party specialist on bloc affairs, Ponomarev, seem to be implied criticism of the original Chinese program and claims. While the Chinese have now endorsed the Soviet Seven-Year Plan Theses and softened their claims about the transition to communism, the basic Chinese position on the communes appears to remain unchanged. The circumstances surrounding Mao's resignation as chief of state are still unclear and the parallel with the Soviet situation is not an exact one, but the possibility exists that his resignation from the governmental position may be at least a potential source of embarrassment to Khrushchev. There is a recent intelligence report from a source which has been reasonably reliable in the past to the effect that at the Wu Han conference (ending December 10), at which Mao discussed his proposed resignation with other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, he said that he did not intend to make the same mistake as Khrushchev. When Malenkov was Soviet Premier and Khrushchev First Secretary, Mao is alleged to have stated, this was the proper situation. By assuming the premiership as well as the first secretaryship, Mao is supposed to have continued, Khrushchev is following the course of Stalin rather than that of Lenin.

On the other hand the slight backing down of the Chinese is balanced by other evidence suggesting that the Soviet line on some issues may have been altered to accommodate the Chinese. An article critical of Nehru appeared in the December issue of the world communist journal, written by P. Yudin, Soviet ambassador to the CPR. Supposedly the Chinese Communists had previously been somewhat unhappy about the nearly unqualified build-up which Moscow had been giving to Nehru and about Soviet support for the Indian government in general. This article would seem to signal a shift to a line more acceptable to the Chinese. However, the basic ideological threat posed by the Chinese to Moscow's ideological primary has not been removed, and the Soviet regime undoubtedly still regards Chinese developments with very serious concern. C

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There also remains the possibility that much of the purpose of the December plenum was to prepare for further action against the anti-Party group. The criticism of them was severe and Khrushchev acknowledged that it was hard to refer to them as "comrades," which would suggest that their removal from the Party was contemplated. Other criticism at the plenum seemed to fall hardest on Malenkov, who was accused of being "capable of any abomination." On the other hand the possible effects of any further action against this group must weigh heavily on the minds of the leaders, particularly Khrushchev. The confession of Bulganin, while ominous, ends on the note that he will endeavor in his new position to demonstrate his usefulness and mended ways, thereby again reechoing previous indications that additional punishment was not necessary in regard to the anti-Party group.

While there were these unusual aspects surrounding the December plenum, the meeting also was a convincing demonstration that Khrushchev, regardless of any disagreement, was running the show with some degree of success. His attacks on the anti-Party group were dutifully echoed and many of the important local Party leaders speaking of the plenum slipped in a word of approbation for Khrushchev personally. The most notable of such praise for Khrushchev, however, occurred at the RSFSR Supreme Soviet session on December 27. At that time D. Polyansky, the RSFSR Premier, stated:

... in the realization of the most important measures which have enabled us in a short period of time to achieve outstanding success in all branches of economic and cultural building, in the defense of the Leninist political course worked out by the 20th Party Congress against the attacks of the anti-Party group, exceptionally great merit was shown by N.S. Khrushchev.

N.S. Khrushchev, as no one else, has close contact with life, with the people, and that enables him to raise and solve correctly -- together with all the members of the Central Committee of the Party -- the most complicated problems arising from life itself, to have a clear foresight, to work out new aspects of the theory and practice of communist building."

Against this background it does not appear likely that Khrushchev will face anything in the nature of a serious challenge to his position in the period remaining before the Party Congress nor at the session itself. On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that his reasons for defensiveness have been wholly eliminated; and his policies may show a greater degree of accommodation to others than he might otherwise desire.